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VIII. LIFE CYCLE

Pregnancy

After intercourse, conception depends on the will of the goddess ta-ë': it is she who gives the fetus its body and soul. When, overburdened with tasks, ta-ë' grows careless, the child is born with defects in mind or body. 842 [776]

We have already noted (pp. 22 and 46) the effects of a pregnant woman's intrusion in a clay pit or at maize planting, but on the whole there are few restrictions for her. She eats peppers lest the fetus become too fat, which would complicate birth; she eats the tripes of the alligator (jacaré-tinga) so that the child shall be born with a clear skin; and drinking the water of the *cipó barí* during pregnancy produces the same effect, as does staring at persons of white skin. Whoever eats double bananas will have only daughters. A real diet during pregnancy appears never to have been prescribed. If a girl is bitten by a type of ant called kaë'na, she will subsequently have children of a dark complexion. 843 [825]

Voluntary abortion.—A woman sometimes produces abortion in order to avoid the shame of having a "disqualified" child, i.e., one that belongs to no clan because its father is a Neobrazilian. Thus, an Indian girl named Neca, of the Rio Jacurapé, finding herself pregnant by a Neobrazilian, confessed her condition to her mother; both then concealed the affair from the girl's father, whom they feared, because he was a somewhat violent man. When Neca could no longer hide her pregnancy, the mother took her into the garden patch, where she succeeded in aborting the child by treading on the girl's belly. 847

According to legend, after an abortion, the cadaver of the fetus goes to ta-ë', who cooks it in a pot until it disintegrates. When the pan becomes full, the goddess keeps it until the death of the sinner, and thus addresses the soul when it arrives: "Thou hast slain the child I gave thee; now eat of thy property!" The sinful mother must eat the stew to the last morsel, however much she may beg and wail that she can eat no more. 847 775

Twins.—Twins (ta tarë'/pi; tarë, two) are not overly welcome since they increase the mother's work, but they are not killed. I myself knew a married couple in Igarapé de São Jeronymo who had twins; the reason was given me by an Indian, who asserted that the mother, while yet a child, had eaten double bananas. Others simply say that twins are due only to the will of ta-ë'. 845

Birth

When parturition is near, the husband erects a temporary platform close to the ground and hidden in a thicket some thirty paces behind the house. As soon as the pains begin, the woman is conducted there, where her hammock and mosquito bar are rigged up, and a piece of tururí bark cloth is spread over the platform. Her mother, aunt, or eldest sister attends her, the husband remaining in the house. If there are difficulties, a medicine man is sent for; smoking a tauary cigarette, he makes gestures with his hands as if he were opening some invisible object from below. 844 [755]

Blows on the back with the mouth of a manioc press are also recommended in difficult labor. The woman squats on her heels on the platform, with her arms

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would ensure a grand catch of fish. The following legend, "The Son of Timbó," concerns this ancient ceremony.

The relatives of the vorĕkĭ took her with them into the jungle in order to pull timbó for her bath. While so occupied they left her sitting on a nodular outgrowth of a timbó root, where she remained waiting the entire time while the relatives were busy in the timbó stand. Without having had any sexual relations whatsoever she became pregnant by the spirit of the timbó and gave birth to a son. When, after six months, she carried the child for the first time to take a bath in the igarapé, she noticed that as soon as she dipped the little boy into the water, the fish died in great numbers around him. When, in the second bath, this phenomenon was repeated, she realized that the boy was the cause and that he was the son of timbó. From then on she no longer bathed him in the igarapé, for fear that all the fish might die, but bathed him on land. When the boy grew older, his relatives used him to kill fish, allowing him to swim a little in the igarapé.

Koch-Grünberg collected an Arekuna legend of a boy who produced the same effects."

A couple of hours [boat trip] above the settlement of Santa Rita an igarapé debouches from the left bank of the Solimões; the old maps give it the name of Quiriá, but today it is called Igarapé da Rita. This name, which it bore even before the founding of Santa Rita in 1870, gave rise to the following story.

In this igarapé there was a Tukuna girl called Rita in Portuguese. One day, after her puberty ceremony, her relatives prepared a solution of timbó in a large basin made from a paxiuba spatulate. Taking the girl, they all went for a turn about the igarapé, where the present homes of Nino and Sebastião are now, and where there is a very deep sink (poço), which never dries up. They seated Rita on a horizontal fallen log in the igarapé and washed her with timbó. The fish began to die, and the current carried them off downstream. Everyone followed the prize, leaving Rita seated alone on her log. When they returned she had disappeared, and not the slightest trace of her was ever seen again; hence they were convinced that some immortal had carried her off.

Supplementary ceremony.—After six or eight months, when the vorĕkĭ's hair has grown again, a supplementary ceremony is celebrated, like the one after the first depilation (see p. 90), and like it called dyɔ-pa'kẽẽ (to cut the hair across the forehead). The owner of the house, when he wishes to celebrate it, says: "čɛ'i nɛ'i ẽ' čɑ gu'u" ("I shall burn the fleas"), since they believe that, unless this is done, fleas will increase in a disagreeable way. For this feast drinks are also prepared, but a smaller group of guests is invited and no costumes are requested. Uaricánas and seclusion are also lacking.

On this occasion the leftovers from the previous celebration are burned in the center of the house—the masks and fringes but not the tururí cloth of the costumes, which they utilize as mats. The coals of the fire are passed round the heels of those present to prevent them from being attacked by fleas.

Subsequent menstruation.—There are few restrictions for this. Only if the flow is very strong does the menstruating girl retire for a while. The spirits of certain trees such as the kapok—*sumaúma* (vɔčí'ne), which the Tukuna identify with the *curupira* of the Neobrazilians—have the tendency to wound menstruating women with "arrows," even by day; this is why women do not like to stray far from the house yard while menstruating. Contact with menstrual blood makes a man inefficient (l.g., *panéma;* T., ñẽẽ[n]) in hunting and fishing, and even in other activities. A pepper bath is the most efficacious antidote.

[n] Koch-Grünberg, Vom Roroima zum Orinoco, 2:70.

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choose [the powers he desires]: "Do you want these two?' They are good ones. Or those two? They are bad ones. Or these others?" The disciple swallows the ones chosen.

On the following day the master teaches his pupil the songs of the tree spirits, and at night asks one of them to visit the pupil. It comes to him in a dream in human form, about the size of a four-year-old child, and hands the dreamer a small gourd with a tobacco infusion, which he drinks. Then the spirit asks him what he wishes, and the disciple indicates his desire to have the spirit as an assistant. Then the spirit sings his song (na'aë), which the novice learns and sings after the visitor's departure.

When this initiation is completed, the master does not fail to advise the learner in forceful and energetic terms never to abuse his acquired powers but to employ them exclusively against "our enemies," that is, against evil sorcerers, so that he will not, beneath the cudgels of avengers, die before his time.

Witchcraft through "thorns".'—However, for a shaman the temptation to employ his acquired powers against any object of private disaffection is great and, if the new shaman has not already received any magical substances (ta:'kaka) of evil effect, he asks one of the spirit trees that possess thorns, especially the pupunha palm and the açacú, for them. At the foot of one of these trees he clears a spot, and on it he places a small gourd with a cigarette rolled in the inner bark of tauarí lying across the top. The following morning he finds in the pot the ta:'kaka, which contains (in an altered state) the thorns requested; this he swallows. The thorns, the sorcerer's "arrows," are placed on his right forearm; the "bow" is his left forearm.

Even so, the sorcerer does not shoot his projectiles with the motion of an arrow release. Going alone into the jungle after sunset, he concentrates the magic substances on his right thumb, and, giving a flick with the thumbnail placed beneath the nail of the third finger, he speeds the thorns on their way toward the victim. Some shamans, as far as can be ascertained, vomit the ta:'kaka, afterward throwing it with the hand. The thorns, always male and female, penetrate the body of the bewitched invisibly, and usually insensibly; there they meet and reproduce in great numbers, spreading throughout the entire body via the bloodstream, corrupting it and causing death, unless a competent person intervenes in time.

The sick person has recourse to a shaman, whose first care is to see in a dream the perpetrator of evil. Afterward, by feeling the patient he locates the thorns and extracts them by sucking. A treatment with vegetable medicines completes the cure (see p. 23). The medicinal properties of many plants are general knowledge, and they may be used by anyone; it is only hoped that the shaman may have more extensive knowledge of them.

Occasionally the Tukuna employ a curious medicine to provoke vomiting. In the igapós of their territory, a tree frog (*Phyllomedusa* sp.; T., ba'koro, in imitation of the croak) is found fairly frequently, which has a vivid green back, a whitish belly, and on its flanks a slime of soapy consistency that disintegrates in water. The creature moves extremely slowly, hence it is easily captured. The Indians

[a] Magical substances are always in pairs, male and female.

[b] *Espinhos*: lit., "thorns," "boils," "afflictions." After examination of the context, I believe that "thorns" is the best term.—Trans.

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(naa'ẽ) of Marcellino had left his body in a dream and gone far up the Solimões to kill people in Peru. There it was wounded by a shaman's knife, and when it returned, Marcellino died of this wound, blood welling up from his mouth. He vomited two potfuls of ta:'kaka, after which he bade farewell to all: "The soul of my deceased mother has just arrived; now I shall go with her!" he said, and died.

Calixto daueru'kị told me that the magic songs leave the shaman's body in the form of wasps, lizards, and other small creatures, coming forth from the mouth and disappearing immediately. Nino, in spite of the experience related above, was of the opinion that the magic substances "died of hunger" within the body of the shaman.

The shaman's trance.—Every shaman has certain specific methods of curing, according to his own personal experience. Nino told me how the old shaman Romão proceeded when he undertook cures, at which the informant had been present many times. First, the doctor placed a wad of cut tobacco in each cheek, sat down next to the sufferer—later ordering a cleared place prepared behind him—and began his invocations. After some time, he coughed, fell backward and, shaking his knees, began to sing. It was a tree spirit that had entered his body, singing now through his mouth and declaring that it had caused the disease by command of sorcerer So-and-so. The voice came from Romão's throat as if it came from one of those thick bamboo horns, ko'i'ri, used at the puberty ceremony by moiety B. It was said that he had a bumblebee in his throat which caused the sound. When Romão became senile, the insect abandoned him, and he never sang again. After the song, Romão got up to suck from the sufferer's body the pathogenic material. Songs and sucking were thus repeated several times. After the cure was completed, he spat out the tobacco into a special little pot, which he threw away afterward.

It appears to me that it was a cure of this type which Lewis Herndon surprised and interrupted in 1851 at Tabatinga:

> After dark he [the missionary] proposed that we should go out and see some of the incantations of the Indians for the cure of the sick. We heard music at a distance, and approached a large house whence it proceeded, in which the padre said there was almost always someone sick. We listened at the door, which was closed. There seemed to be a number of persons singing inside. I was almost enchanted myself. I never heard such tones, and think that even instrumental music could not be made to equal them. . . . I had heard nothing like this before. The tones were so low, so faint, so guttural, and at the same time so sweet and clear that I could scarcely believe they came from human throats; and they seemed fitting sounds in which to address spirits of another world. . . . The noise we made in opening the door caused a hasty retreat of some persons, which we could hear and partly see; and when we entered, we found but two Indians—an old man and a young one—sitting on the floor by a little heap of flaming copal, engaged in chewing tobacco and spitting it in an earthen pot before them. The young man turned his face to the wall with a sullen look, and although the old man smiled when he was patted on the head and desired to proceed with his music, yet it was with a smile that had no mirth of satisfaction in it and showed plainly that he was annoyed, and would have expressed his annoyance had he dared.[6]

Shamans' pipes.—Formerly, the shamans also smoked pipes instead of tauarí cigarettes. These pipes, čimịta'pa (čimị, centipede), made of black marajá palm wood, were from 15 to 20 cm. long and cone-shaped. The bowl in which the tobacco was placed was between 3 and 4 cm. in diameter. The pipe was smoked through a

[6] Herndon and Gibbon, 1:236.

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lateral hole, a little below the tip. It was so described to me by Nino, who had seen one used by old Romão. I myself never got to see one.

Soul loss.—We have already seen (p. 101) how the spirits of the trees may cause disease, not only at the request of a sorcerer but also spontaneously. In addition, there are still two categories of disease: those caused by soul loss and those caused by epidemics of post-Columbian origin. The tree spirits kidnap the souls of the living, but apparently only those of children, as do the aquatic demon dyë'vaš and the ghosts of the defunct (načii'). For this purpose they whistle and call a child by name when the soul accompanies it by night through the jungle.

Nino told me how the soul of his daughter, ñua'čina, had been stolen when the child was being given a bath in the igarapé. As a result, she became pallid and weak and, had not the shaman Thomaz intervened, she would have died. At nightfall he sang, as the child lay in her mother's arms; he blew smoke over her from heel to head and in the opposite direction, then placed the extinct cigarette butt below the nape of her neck and went to sleep. At midnight he awoke and inquired about the child's condition. She was already nursing again, and her eyes were normal. He then ordered the parents to suspend the cigarette butt from her neck until it should fall of its own accord.

When a child under two years of age cries alone, the shades of the dead arrive and carry off its soul. A shaman may force its return to the body again by the process described above, but the danger is that the soul may have already tasted the food of the shades. In this event, the child begins to eat earth, coal, and so forth, and always dies sooner or later.

Cure of epidemics.—Epidemics come from the sun, where their presence is indicated by a greenish aureole. Without the sun's desire they are carried off by the wind, which spreads them among men. On the occasion of a serious epidemic of catarrh, a certain shaman called the people together, collected the invisible pathogenic substance from each, placed it in an urn, and rendered it harmless by smoking.

Dreams.—During a dream, the soul (naa'ë) abandons the body and has its own adventures, which are real and may be of great consequence. Through dreams the shaman acquires his spirit assistant, gets in touch with the tree spirit, or identifies the sorcerer responsible for a patient's illness or death. We have seen how an injury to the soul of a warlock in a dream excursion caused the warlock's death. Some adventures of the soul in dreams are warnings of things to come in the near future. If a bank subsides or a tree falls on a person in a dream, it is because others plot against him. If he sees himself painted with genipapo, this means blood and that he will be murdered. An encounter with a jaguar in a dream indicates the arrival of a companion or of a member of the čiva' (jaguar) clan, whereas the visit of an Auahy clan member is announced by a dream of a snake. If the snake turns aggressive, however, disease is on the way.

Female witchcraft.—Contrary to what Tessmann was told, there are no female magicians in contact with tree spirits or capable of causing death or of removing the spells put on others. What can happen is this: a woman, in order to injure the object of her hatred, plucks a few of her victim's hairs, which she places in an ant nest. Or she ties them to some branches on the riverbank where their seesaw

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754 682 Threatened with death, he fled to the Rio Jacurapá, a tributary on the left bank of the Içá. At the Igarapé da Rita, when I arrived there in May, 1942, they had accused him of having caused the death of the wife of an Indian named Hippolyto čə'rēk|, nephew of Nino ɐvən|°k|; the death of another Indian's wife; the grave illness of the wife of Sebastião, Nino's brother; and finally, the illness of Hippolyto himself.

123 754 682 I encountered Hippolyto in a condition already quite serious, treated him with medicines and an adequate diet during my entire first stay in the Igarapé, visited him daily, and finally effected a cure. A day later, however, he again awoke suddenly in a desperate state. As soon as he recovered his speech he told us that during the night he had seen the soul of the warlock u'iru climbing up the door of the house, armed with a club with which to kill him. In fact, u'iru struck him many blows on the head, knocking him off the platform on which he slept. While Hippolyto still lay struggling on the floor, his little boys ran to call relatives who lived close by, Sebastião and Nino. These immediately ran to Hippolyto's aid and found him stretched out senseless on the floor. However, he recovered rapidly, especially [755] after the intervention of the shaman Benedicto, to whom I myself paid a knife, a handful of cheap glass beads, and a piece of tobacco to make him treat the case, seeing that what Hippolyto needed most was spiritual medicine in accordance with his mentality. That is how I left him when I moved from Igarapé da Rita to Igarapé de São Jeronymo on the twenty-second of May. On the fifth of June, Christovão e'k|rak|, another brother of Nino and uncle of Hippolyto, while fishing in the Rio Solimões suddenly espied u'iru and his family descending the river below toward the Jacurapá, and advised his kinfolk immediately. Hippolyto then decided that the hour of vengeance was at hand, in which decision he was supported by his uncles Nino and Christovão. With all speed the three pursued u'iru in two canoes. They caught up with him in the middle of the Solimões, overpowered him, bound him hand and foot, and threw him into the river. They struck the oldest child, some three or four years old, with their paddles, also throwing it into the water. The youngest child was torn from its mother's arms and was also drowned. They struck the woman several times and tossed her into the river, too, but Christovão pulled her into his canoe and thus saved her life. The kinsmen of Hippolyto had deliberately carried out the slaughter of the sorcerer without spilling blood, [783] for the spilling of blood would have greatly complicated the subsequent purification rite.

The three slayers returned immediately to their houses, which were situated a short distance from one another on the Igarapé da Rita. Shortly before arriving at Christovão's home they landed the woman at the door of Custodio, a friendly, hard-working old Indian with a large family, who was the father-in-law of Christovão and Nino. This woman succeeded in so frightening old Custodio, lest Hippolyto and his uncles attack and destroy him and his household, that from one hour to the next he decided to flee with his entire family, very much against the wishes of his adult son, who had a good plantation at his place and all the necessary material ready for a new house. But they did leave, taking with them u'iru's widow, and sought refuge among a group of Tukuna inhabiting a tributary on the left bank of the lower Rio Jandiatuba.

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ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

532 **Art.**—The *Tucuna* were fine sculptors. Their carved figures on the dancing sticks, stools, and tucumã nut figures in their necklaces are at times very artistic. Painting is restricted mainly to masks and pottery ornamentation.

533 **Music.**—During feasts, the *Tucuna* sing in a falsetto voice so low that
534 it can hardly be heard. Three important instruments are: (1) a wooden, tubular megaphone into which they speak and sing and which is 22 feet (6¼ m.) long with an opening 5 inches (12 cm.) wide and a mouthpiece 2 inches (5 cm.) long; (2) a conical trumpet 13 feet to 19½ feet (4 to 6 m.) long made of a strip of bark wound spirally; and (3) a piston whistle made of liana bark. The last is always sounded before the other two. In any ceremony there is always a faithful imitation of the European [177] drum and a *Thevetia*-shell rattle, the latter taking the place of the conventional maracá, which is unknown. The old form of drum was possibly the shell of a chelonium, which now is used only in one ceremonial. There are also panpipes, bone flutes, and bamboo horns.

Adult games.—In shuttlecock, a maize-husk ball is batted into the air
526 with the palm of the hand by men standing in a ring. In a tug-of-war in which a thick liana is used, one team of men competes against another. A ring-and-pin game is played by two men facing each other. Grown [524] girls make cats cradles with threads wrapped around the fingers, toes, and head.

273 **Beverages.**—Women make alcoholic beverages from maize, cooked bitter manioc, and half-burned cakes (beijú) of manioc; the last was [177] adopted from the Neo-Brazilians. Today many men are addicted to rum.
[733]

SHAMANISM

754 Even today many Indians possess magic powers to help or harm others.
756 These powers come from intercourse with the spirits of certain trees with which an old shaman puts his disciple in contact. The neophyte shaman receives a magic substance which contains invisible thorns. He throws these into his victim's body, where they reproduce and cause his death [755] unless another shaman sucks them out and completes the cure by applying herbs. The shaman chews tobacco (formerly, he used a tubular wooden pipe with an opening on the side for the mouth) to become possessed of the spirit which supplied the magic pathogenic substance to the witch [276] doctor. Chewing tobacco identifies the evil shaman.

753 Children fall ill when the spirits of the trees kidnap their souls. Epidemics come from the sun and are spread by the wind.

683 When the *Tucuna* are convinced that a shaman is responsible for one or
672 more deaths, their revenge even reaches his relatives. In 1942, three *Tucuna* killed a much-feared shaman and his two sons. The avengers